

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NIRVĀṆA AND MOKṢA

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Abstract

Every philosophical system is goal oriented. Know thy-self is the message of all saints and sages. Life is full of suffering and purpose is enlightenment. There are different names in different schools to that state. *Nirvāṇa* is in Buddhism and *mokṣa* in Jainism. Teachings of Buddha and Lord Mahāvīra flourished in India in the 6th -5th Cent. B.C. E. According to them ignorance is the root cause of suffering. Spiritual teacher (*guru*) plays an important role in the path of liberation in Buddhism, and Jainism and they gave equal importance to theory (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*). Apparently, they are pessimistic because the teaching of ‘*sarvaṃ dukkhaṃ*’ but in substance they are optimistic as there is a path for freedom from suffering.

Due to common characteristics between the two religious’ traditions, there is ample scope for comparison.

Teaching of Buddha and Mahāvīra are equally useful even today. we find apparent similarities between *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* there are important differences between the two. So *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* are not the same but entirely different goals.

Key words: *nirvāṇa, mokṣa, & dukkha*

Introduction

Know thy-self is the message of all saints and sages. Life is full of suffering and purpose is enlightenment. There are different goals in different philosophical systems. *Nirvāṇa* is in Buddhism and *mokṣa* in Jainism.

Dīghā jāgarato ratti deeghaṃ santassa yojanaṃ

Dhīgo bālānaṃ saṅsāro sadhamma avijānataṃ (1)

Who is awake for him night is long. Who is tired for him distance is long. Not knowing the law cycle of birth and death is long for the fools.

“To be born is to take up a burden and to lay it down is to attain bliss or *nirvāṇa*. (2)

Teachings of Buddha and Lord Mahāvīra flourished in India in the 6th - 5th Cent. B.C.E. According to them ignorance is the root cause of suffering and purpose of this life is enlightenment. For Buddhism it is *nirvāṇa*, and for Jainism *mokṣa*. Spiritual teacher (*guru*) plays an important role in the path of liberation in Buddhism, and Jainism and they gave equal importance to theory (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*). Man embraces his wife as also his daughter; though the action is the same thoughts are different. Therefore, mind is responsible for evil action and not the body. Apparently, they are pessimistic because the teaching of ‘*sarvaṃ dukkhaṃ*’ but in substance they are optimistic as there is a path for freedom from suffering.

Due to common characteristics between the two religious’ traditions, there is ample scope for comparison.

Dukkha

In the ordinary sense *dukkha* means suffering, pain, misery and discomfort. It is something which is opposed to happiness, comfort and ease. *Dukkha* according to Buddha, does not merely refer to ordinary corporeal suffering of man.

To explain the term *dukkha* some English words are used such as disease, ill, suffering, trouble, misery, distress, agony, affliction and woe in certain connection though they are never fully right.

Nirvāṇa

Nirvāṇa is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Buddha has described unifying feature of his doctrine and discipline making use of simile of an ocean and its taste. “And even monks as the great ocean have one taste, the taste of salt even so monk does his dhamma and discipline has one taste the taste of freedom” (3) The word *Nirvāṇa* means cooling or blown out.

Nirvāṇa is the same thing as sinless calm state of mind and best may be rendered as holiness, perfect peace, goodness and wisdom. It is a state of enlightenment (*bodhi*) which removes all ignorance. It is a state of perfect equanimity which removes all attachment, aversion and delusion. *Nirvāṇa* is described in many terms, such as immortality, (*amṛta*), the ultimate security (*anuttara-yogakkhema*), farther shore (*parā*), the island (*dvīpa*) summum bonum (*nihsreyasa*). It is a state of bliss, crown of happiness, perfect peace and freedom from greed, hatred and delusion. After facing all the ups and downs of life, still the mind remains unshaken not lamenting, not generating defilements, always feeling secure this is the greatest happiness.

Passions are compared with fires. Passion lessness is cooling of fires. It is extinction of becoming of rebirth. (*bhava-nirodha*)

As a flame blown out because of wind cannot be recognized; even so a *muni* delivered from mind and body disappears and cannot be reckoned as existing.

The third noble truth of cessation of suffering must be realized for oneself. When one has experienced *nibbāṇa*, only then it is real to him, all doubts vanish and all arguments about it become irrelevant.

According to Buddha no birth is free from suffering; even the birth of king or God there is suffering. In every birth suffering is inevitable. Therefore, one should not desire for fortunate rebirth; because no rebirth is wholly fortunate. Therefore, the aim is liberation from all suffering. When we free ourselves from cycle of suffering, we experience an unalloyed happiness greater than any worldly pleasures.

Nirvāṇa means cessation of suffering. If we stop rebirth then automatically, we stop old age, death and lamentation. *Nirvāṇa* means freedom from afflictions, mental imbalance, disturbance and worry. *Nirvāṇa* is possible in the human body, whereas animals and those who are born in lower realms cannot practice the teaching of Buddha. Human body form provides the best bodily basis for attaining liberation. It is also difficult for Gods to attain liberation.

Mokṣa

The happiness comes through other objects such as happiness comes from sensual object is called *kāma*. This is not real happiness but pseudo happiness. Again, this happiness is mix with pain. Happiness depends on oneself is called *mokṣa*. To obtain liberation is the ultimate destiny of man. When cessation of bondage and its cause takes place then it is called *mokṣa*.

“When that annihilation takes place, then alone is there an absence of all the *karmas* as a result of which the cycle of birth and death comes to a stop. This is what constitutes *mokṣa*. (4) “As a heat can unite with iron and water with milk so *karma* unites with the soul and soul so united with *karma* is called a soul in bondage. (5)

If a bird is for a long time in the cage and gets a chance it leaves the cage and flies in the air; and never comes again in the cage. Similarly, when the soul is free from the dispositions of his past actions, he will never experience cycle of birth and death. The free enjoyment of one’s own nature results from cessation of all defiled mental states, that is of all attachments, aversion and of all yoga.

When *jīva* is free from *ajīva* the state is called *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* is so conditioned that it involves an absence of all desires and an emergence of natural contentment.

Man gets liberation by his own spiritual effort. The man does not need the grace of God for liberation. Jainism believes in self effort.

To obtain liberation is the ultimate destiny of man. Man is capable of attaining this highest stage by his personal effort.

In liberation, there are different stages through which an aspirant has to pass such as *Sādhu*, *Upādhyāya*, *ācārya*, *vyavasthita*, *arihant* and *Siddha*. *Siddha* is the highest stage.

In *mokṣa* one will experience real happiness. This is permanent and not depends on any other object. *Mokṣa* is so conditioned that it involves an absence of all desires and an emergence of natural contentment. Happiness born from contentment is the real happiness.

One will get light from the sun; but even the sun is covered by clouds some dim light does trickle out. If clouds are very dark and deep then light is not very bright. Light is the nature of the sun and covering the light is against the nature. Similarly, nature of soul is knowledge. But when soul is veiled by (*āvaraṇa*) different *karmas* he forgets his own nature; thinks that ignorance is the nature of soul. Most of the people live in ignorance. When that cover is destroyed then soul shines in his own light.

Similarities between nirvāṇa and mokṣa

- 1) Cycle of birth and death ceases in *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa*. “When the *ātma* is freed from all bondage of *karma* and has passed for ever beyond the possibility of rebirth it is said to have attained *mokṣa* or complete deliverance. (6)
- 2) *Mokṣa* and *nirvāṇa* are the state of sorrow lessness. “Health is the greatest gift. Once own contentment is the greatest wealth. Confidence (intimacy) is the most excellent of relationships. *Nirvāṇa* is the highest happiness. (7)
- 3) One can experience *mokṣa* and *nirvāṇa* in this life and not necessarily after death.
- 4) *Mokṣa* and *nirvāṇa* are indescribable.
- 5) Wisdom plays very important role in attainment of *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa*.
- 6) One can attain *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* with self-effort and grace of God is not required. “No one’s realization of truth will liberate us. Even the enlightenment of Buddha could liberate only one person, Siddhartha Gautama. You have to do your own work; those who have reached the goal will only show the way.” (8)
- 7) *Nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* are not the result of eightfold path. *Nirvāṇa* is not the result of anything. *Nirvāṇa* is neither cause nor effect. It is beyond cause and effect. It is not produced like mystic spiritual mental state. “When bird gets freedom from its cage what is meant is not putting anything else in its place in the cage but only removing the cage, which acted as an obstruction to the freedom of bird. Similarly, when soul achieves *mokṣa* it merely experiences what potentially is its own and nothing new. Thus, when *mokṣa* is achieved the pure and free *ātmā* gets its own natural state. (9)
- 8) There is similarity between *sopādhiśeṣa* and *nirupādhiśeṣa nirvāṇa* with *jivanmukti* and *videhamukti*.
- 9) Bondage and liberation are real in Buddhism and Jainism.

Differences between nirvāṇa and mokṣa

- 1) *Nirvāṇa* is freedom from self but *mokṣa* is realization of self. *Vipassanā* meditation is for realization of emptiness of self. But in Jainism soul realizes its own nature. “Observe the soul through the medium of soul. (10)
- 2) *Nirvāṇa* is attained by knowledge of impermanence but *mokṣa* is attained by knowledge of permanence.
- 3) After attainment of *nirvāṇa* it is not necessary that person become omniscient. Even *arahata* who destroys all afflictions is not omniscient. Person who destroys attachment, aversion, ego, and ignorance such person is known as *arahata*. (11) But after attainment of *mokṣa* one becomes omniscient. As a result of annihilation of delusion as also that of *jñānāvaraṇa*, *darshanāvaraṇa* and *antarāya* it appears omniscience. (12)
- 4) In Jainism householder is capable to achieve highest state, but in Buddhism one has to renounce the world to achieve *nirvāṇa*. After attainment of *nirvāṇa* person either becomes monk or dies.
- 5) *Paññā* realizes *nirvāṇa*. There is no thinker behind the thought in the same way it is wisdom realization that realizes there is no self behind the realization” But in Jainism soul realizes its own nature.
- 6) There are four pairs of liberated persons in Buddhism. (13) but in Jainism we will not find the pairs of liberated persons.
- 7) In Buddhism there is stage called temporary *nibbāna* (*tadaṅga nibbāna*) “The freedom as detailed above brings sense of peace and Bhikkhu is thoroughly blessed with blissful calm such state of mind is in fact called temporary *nibbana*” (14) But in Jainism no stage known as temporary *mokṣa*.

Conclusion: Teaching of Buddha and Mahāvīra are equally useful even today. It is not the case that reality is one and for Buddha it is *nirvāṇa* and for Mahāvīra it is *mokṣa*. It is not the case that *ekaṃ sat viprāḥ bahudā vadanti* (15) One reality is known by various names by learned people. *Haṃsa śvetāḥ bakaḥ śvetāḥ ko bakabhedho haṃsayo nirkhīrviveketu haṃsohaṃso bakobakāḥ* (16) Swan is white and heron is white but swan can discriminate between water and milk but heron cannot. Just as due to one difference heron is not swan similarly though we find apparent similarities between *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* there are important differences between the two. So *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* are not the same but entirely different goals.

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